

[Sugar gliders](#) are loving, interesting, energetic, and curious animals that have become popular pets. While they may look like rodents, they are small marsupials, closely related to kangaroos and koalas.

As a nocturnal tree-dwelling species, sugar gliders have large eyes to help them navigate in the darkness. These big-eyed marsupials get their name from a flap of tissue connecting their wrists and ankles, called the gliding membrane. This allows them to sail from one place to another.

Sugar gliders can make wonderful pets and bond closely with their human families if given the care, enrichment, and socialization they need for many years. Sugar glider lifespans can reach 12-15 years with proper care.

Gliders are very social and live in groups of five to 12 in the wild. They are quite vocal and are usually passive, but may bite when scared, stressed, in pain, or poorly socialized.

As pets, sugar gliders must be kept in groups, fed a special diet, and need an extra source of warmth year round. They are nocturnal, can be very noisy at night, and need specialized veterinary care.

Before taking one of these little critters home, it's important to understand that they should not be impulsively adopted. Sugar gliders require unique care, and are a lengthy time commitment for a pet parent.

## **Sugar Glider Housing**

Providing great care is key to a happy and healthy sugar glider. This begins with finding comfortable housing for your small companion.

Gliders are from Australia and New Guinea and are an arboreal species, meaning they live in trees. Imitating their natural environment allows your glider to be as comfortable as possible.

### **Cages for Sugar Gliders**

These little creatures need housing that allows them to “glide” over distances. Aviaries are preferable habitats for sugar gliders—the bigger, the better. Ceiling height is ideal.

However, if an aviary is not possible, cages should be made of PVC-coated wire with plenty of spots for gliders to climb and grab. The openings in the mesh shouldn't be bigger than 1 inch. Glider cages should be at least 36×24×40 inches, with height prioritized over width.

Gliders are very active and will use their entire enclosure to exercise, play, and explore.

Sugar gliders enjoy toys and other items in their cage. Adding hide and nest boxes and pouches will allow your gliders safety, comfort, and dark areas to rest.

Change the enrichment tools around your glider's cage often, including shelves, a solid running wheel, swings, and bird toys. Branches and plants are extremely important for gliders and will allow them room to leap and climb.

Use caution with any natural products to ensure you're not introducing pests or chemical sprays. [Sugar gliders](#) will chew on branches, so make sure only nontoxic plants and trees are provided.

Many veterinarians and pet parents recommend keeping two water bowls in the cage to prevent dehydration—a traditional hanging water bottle and a second water dish on the cage floor near their glider's food bowl.

### **Sugar Glider Bedding**

Line the bottom of your glider's cage with paper towels, hay, or Carefresh bedding. Stay away from wood shavings, which may cause irritation and infection to the eyes, nose, throat, and respiratory system.

It's important to spot-clean the cage daily and perform a more thorough cleaning of housing, toys, and accessories every week. If you have multiple sugar gliders in one habitat, it's important to do multiple cleans a week.

### **Temperature for Sugar Gliders**

Don't keep your glider in bright sunlight as they are nocturnal. Sugar gliders thrive around 75–90 degrees Fahrenheit and should never be kept in environments lower than 70 degrees Fahrenheit—even at night. Pet parents need additional heat sources in the colder months to provide appropriate temperatures for their gliders.

Glider should always have a section of their enclosure that is close to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. This doesn't need to be the temperature of the entire cage—one sleeping area will suffice.

### **What Do Sugar Gliders Eat?**

A sugar glider's diet varies. As omnivores, they adjust their food choices based on climate and season. In the wild, food for sugar gliders includes pollen, insects, larva, spiders, sap, gum, plant blossoms, and nectar. It's difficult to reproduce this ever-changing diet in captivity, so domesticated sugar gliders frequently suffer from poor nutrition.

Home diets can sometimes provide the nutrients required to keep a sugar glider healthy, but they're complicated and difficult to make. Speak with your veterinarian for help creating the most effective diet for your pet.

Kathy Johnson-Delaney's feeding protocol for sugar gliders can help give additional insight to your glider's health needs. Insects should be gut-loaded and dusted with a calcium supplement. Gut-loading means feeding these insects a nutritious diet for 24–48 hours before feeding them to your sugar glider. By gut-loading, the insects are packed with vitamins and minerals that positively impact your glider.

Make sure to rotate all varieties of your glider's food. Don't feed your glider fatty or super sweet foods, pits, seeds, or too many insects or fruits. Sugar gliders may ignore other food sources—preferring the sweet fruits or juicy insects and ignore nutrient-laden foods. This can lead to obesity and metabolic disorders.

Some examples of healthy food choices to feed on regular rotation with your sugar glider include:

Insects:

- Crickets
- Mealworms
- Superworms
- Waxworms

Vegetables:

- Squash
- Cucumber
- Bell pepper
- Carrots
- Sweet potatoes
- Bok Choy
- Jicama

Fruits:

- Papaya
- Oranges
- Bananas
- Strawberries
- Cantaloupe
- Mango
- Kiwi
- Peaches

It's never appropriate to feed your sugar glider a diet made for cats or reptiles. Avoid chocolate, dairy products, grapes, and raisins. Fruits and treats should not make up more than 5% of your sugar gliders' diet.

Food should be provided in the afternoon or early evening when sugar gliders are naturally feeding. Remove all uneaten food in the morning.

## **Sugar Glider Medical Needs**

Before adopting a sugar glider, it's important to understand that it can be difficult to find a veterinarian that specializes in their care. Find and secure a vet before getting a glider.

Sugar gliders should receive routine veterinary care annually and as needed. Your glider may require bloodwork, fecal analysis, and routine dental checkups.

Healthy sugar gliders are alert, with clean, clear eyes and a smooth, soft coat. Their nose, eyes, and mouth should be clear of any discharge or discoloration.

Males have two scent glands that can be confused with bald spots. One is on the top of their head and the other is on their chest. Healthy sugar gliders are active and inquisitive with no signs of breathing difficulty or malaise. Sugar gliders may develop medical issues throughout their life. The most common conditions include:

- Malnutrition: causing paralysis, blindness, lameness, and seizures
- Obesity
- Parasites: causing loss of appetite or changes in bowel movements
- Hair loss: may be stress-related, especially with un-neutered males and poorly socialized individuals
- Respiratory issues: causing increased breathing rate and effort
- Trauma
- Dental disease: facial swelling, drooling, or decreased appetite
- Cancer: obvious tumors or lethargy and weight loss
- Metabolic bone disease: most sugar gliders don't receive appropriate levels of protein and calcium, which causes metabolic bone disease and may show as decreased appetite, weight loss, lethargy, tremors, and lameness due to broken bones
- Infections: skin, pouch, and tooth infection can cause fever, lethargy, pain, swelling, and discharge
- Blindness and cataracts: hazy eyes and incoordination

If your sugar glider has any physical abnormalities, is behaving or eating differently, is lethargic, or you have any other concerns, contact your vet as soon as possible.

## **Sugar Glider Cleaning Needs**

[Sugar gliders](#) keep themselves clean. They don't require water, dust, or shampoo baths, unless prescribed by your vet.

All food and water dishes should be cleaned daily. Spot-clean the cage for any messes daily. Fully clean the entire cage every week.

Cages should not be cleaned when gliders are inside, as the chemicals may be irritating to eyes, nose, and lungs. Vinegar cleaning products and diluted bleach are all safe to clean the hard items in the cage.

Once everything is completely dry it's safe to place your fur baby back in their habitat—though depending on the humidity and temperature of where you live, this may take a few hours. Make sure it has had time to completely air out before returning your sugar gliders.

## **Sugar Glider Handling and Behavior**

Sugar gliders can be difficult to handle, especially if they are young or poorly socialized. They should never be scruffed (held by the back of the neck) or held by the tail. Many sugar gliders respond well to being carried in a zippered, fleece pouch.

Sugar gliders should have socialization with their human at least one or two hours a day. They are highly social animals and prefer spending time with other sugar gliders. Therefore, they are usually happier in groups of three or more.

If they don't have enough emotional and environmental enrichment, sugar gliders may self-mutilate, causing hair loss, pain, and infection. Neutering males may help ease this behavior. Speak with your vet about any behavioral issues your glider may be having, and how to best solve them. Well-socialized sugar gliders are rarely aggressive. However, when they are frightened or defensive, they may stand on their back legs, make loud noises, possibly charge, and may bite.

### **How to Pick Up Your Sugar Glider**

Pick up your sugar glider by safely and calmly placing one hand on the top of its back and chest, near its arms. Use your other hand to gently scoop from below. They may feel more secure on your shoulders or in a pocket.

Eventually, as they get comfortable with their surroundings, gliders will want to explore.

Exploration is a wonderful way for humans to bond with their sugar gliders and provide them with enrichment. However, due to their highly inquisitive nature, sugar gliders can easily injure or otherwise hurt themselves, so always supervise your glider when they are outside their cage.